Are You a 3G Catholic?

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Today we live in a society that is hooked on high-speed information technology. We get so excited about the amount of bandwidth our cell phone has and how fast we can get our e-mail. My iPhone is a 3GS, and now it is a dinosaur next to the new 4G. Yet, in our efforts to evangelize a greatly secularized and paganized culture, are we as quick to get out the Good News of Jesus Christ and his saving message? Are we, in other words, "3G catholics"? I propose that, to get the Gospel message out to a culture that has eclipsed Jesus out of its vision, we need to

- Get off the couch and bring souls to Christ
- Get reconnected to the mission for all the baptized to spread the Gospel, no matter what our age
- Get over ourselves; it is all about God's grace

In 1988, Pope John Paul II wrote a letter called *On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World* (*Christifideles Laici*). In this address to the Church he used Matthew 20 to explain why the lay faithful needed to go out and bring Jesus to the world and souls to Christ. Essentially he is asking us to get off the couch and bring souls to Christ.

The First "G": Get Off the Couch and Bring Souls to Christ!

Jesus says, "You too go into my vineyard" (Mt 20:4).

In the Gospel of Matthew 20:1-16, the "marketplace" is the world, the "vineyard" is the Church where God wants us to bring souls, and the "landowner" is God the Father who hires us "to bring souls into his Kingdom."

Among the many problems facing the world, one stands out from the rest, namely, how few people know Christ on a personal basis. Many people live and die without ever knowing Christ on a personal basis.

"Since the work that awaits everyone in the vineyard of the Lord is so great, there is no place for idleness."

St. Gregory the Great says, "Each one should examine themselves to see how energetically they are working in the vineyard of the Sower. Perhaps we have not dedicated everything we have to the service of the Lord. The people who really work for him . . . are those who are anxious to win souls and bring others to the vineyard" (St. Gregory the Great, *Homilies on the Gospels*, 19, 2).

Fr. Leo Trese in his book *17 Steps to Heaven* says, "How many converts did you win to the Faith during the past year? . . . During the past 10 years? . . . During your lifetime? Is there a single person of whom you can truthfully say 'I am the one who brought the person into the Church'?" In the same book he also writes, "Very few converts were won over exclusively by a priest's preaching and persuasion . . . in nine out of ten cases, a convert's initial interest in the Catholic Church was inspired by some Catholic friend or acquaintance" (Leo J. Trese, *Seventeen Steps to Heaven: A Catholic Guide to Salvation*, rev. ed. [Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press,1902], 147).

The laity is called to bring the Gospel to the world, to bring souls to Christ and be salt of the earth. The *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People* states

[The laity is to be more diligent,] in fidelity to the mind of the church, in the explanation and defense of christian principles and in the correct application of them to the problems of our times.

Lay people ought themselves to take on as their distinctive task this renewal of the temporal order. Guided by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the church, prompted by Christian love, they should act directly in this domain and in their own way. As citizens among citizens they must bring to their cooperation with others their own special competence, and act on their own responsibility; everywhere and always they have to seek the justice of the kingdom of God. The temporal order is to be renewed in such a way that, while its own principles are fully respected, it is harmonized with the principles of the christian life and adapted to the various conditions of time, place and people. Among the tasks of this apostolate christian social action is preeminent. The council desires to see it extended today to every sector of life, including the cultural sphere. (Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People* [*Apostolicam Actuositatem*], no. 7; see also *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* [*Lumen Gentium*], nos. 33 ff.: A.A.S. 57 [1965], 39 ff.; *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* [*Sacrosanctum Concilium*], nos. 26-40; A.A.S. 56 [1964], 107- 111; *On the Means of Social Communication* [*Inter Mirifica*], A.A.S. 56 [1964], 145-158; *On Ecumenism* [*Unitatis Redintegratio*], A.A.S. 57 [1965], 90-107; *On the Pastoral Office of the Bishops in the Church* [*Christus Dominus*], nos. 16, 17, 18; *On Christian Education* [*Gravissimum Educationis*], nos. 3, 5, 7; *On the Church's Missionary Activity* [*Ad Gentes Divinitus*], nos. 15, 21, 41; *On the Ministry and Life of Priests* [*Presbyterorum Ordinis*], no. 9. All in *Vatican Council II: Volume 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery [Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1996].)

One of the effects of salt is that it was used and is still used as a preservative to keep something from going bad. We salt meats to keep them from going sour. Catholics must be salt to the world to keep society from going bad. How effective have we been in the last forty years?

Think about it: How many Catholics are not going to Church regularly today? How many Catholics have not used the Sacrament of Reconciliation in many years? How many couples are not getting married in the Church and are living in sin through cohabitation? Many! The world today is very confused about what life is about. They do not know the Ten Commandments and how they can live them through the grace of Christ. I visited a CCD class in my parish and asked the children what the third commandment was. A little boy said, "Be nice." We have work to do. Who will bring these souls to Christ?

The Church would answer "the laity." The "average Joe" who works with the people who have lost touch with their faith; the mom who waits in the carpool line with the fallen-away Catholic; the college kid who finds out his buddy has not been to church. All are called to bring souls back to Christ. The members of the laity are the ones who have to get off the couch and bring souls back to Christ.

The Second "G": God Has a Mission for You, No Matter What Your Age

Notice that the landowner in Matthew 20:1-7 calls the workers at different hours of the day: dawn, nine o'clock, noon, three o'clock, and five o'clock. Some of the Fathers of the Church say that this reference represents the different stages of a person's life. The dawn group includes those who are baptized as babies. The nine o'clock group includes those who receive the faith in their youth. The noon group includes those who come into the faith in adulthood. The three and five o'clock groups refer to those who come into the Church in their more mature years.

So what does this mean for us today? God has a mission for all who come into the Church, no matter how old they are. In *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Pope Paul VI states, "Children too have have an apostolate of their own. In their own measure they are true living witnesses of Christ among their companions" (no. 13).

Cardinal Francis Arinze said in a speech, "Like converts like." In other words, doctors convert doctors, firefighters are good at bringing other firefighters to Christ, and mothers are good at bringing other mothers to Christ. The point is, all are called to bring people to Christ!

Today, ask the Holy Spirit to suggest one family member, friend, co-worker, or other person that you might hold in your prayers. Make it your mission to get that person to Church and confession by Easter so that he or she will be singing alleluia with us when we celebrate as we do every Sunday that Christ has risen from the dead!

It does not matter if you are young or old: God has a mission for you to bring souls to Christ!

The Third "G": Get Over Yourself; It Is All About God's Grace

Notice at the end of Matthew 20 that all the workers received the same wage, whether they worked all day or just for two hours. Jesus says, "My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?" (Mt 20:13-15).

Our Lord is making an important point here. The "day's wages" for every person is God's grace. Jesus wants us to understand that his grace is a pure gift. The fact that I was born into a devout family and am a priest today is a grace. The fact that all of us are here now is a grace!

In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we learn, "Grace is *favor*, the *free* and *undeserved help* that God gives us to respond to his call" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. [Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana–United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000], no. 1996; see also Jn 1:12-18; 17:3; Rom 8:14-17; 2 Pet 1:3-4). What does that mean? We need to pray that God opens up the hearts of those we are trying to bring back to the Church. The founder of Opus Dei wrote in his book of meditation *The Way*, "If you are not a man of prayer, I don't believe in the sincerity of your intentions when you say that you work for Christ" (St. Josemaria Escriva, *The Way*, "Prayer," no. 109).

We have to pray in order to bring souls to Christ! Not too long ago at parochial school where I was working, a teacher came to me in distress because her daughter was not going to Church. She had gotten engaged and had decided to have a marriage ceremony outside of the Church in several months and was intent on having this sacrilegious wedding ceremony. I asked if her daughter would talk to a priest. She said, "I have tried to have her talk to several priests but she will not budge on this issue!" So I told the lady to pray a novena to St. Rita of Cascia and then asked her to call me back. St. Rita is the patron saint of "impossible cases." Nine days later the daughter called me to ask if I would prepare her fiancée and herself to get married in the Catholic Church. Alleluia! We must constantly be praying, offering up sacrifices for souls in need, and asking them to pray that God give them grace to hear the word of God and put it into effect!

Today Jesus gives each one of us this message: Get off the couch and bring souls to Christ! God has a mission for you, no matter what your age! Get over yourself; it is all about God's grace!

Be a 3G Catholic!

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